

1988

The portrayal of employed mothers in children's fiction

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Abstract

In American society today, mothers are joining the employment forces for economic purposes, and because they feel a need to fulfill their personal potentials or gain self-actualization. The portrayals of employed mothers in children's fiction should reflect the trends of society, as well as provide appropriate role models for children. The purpose of this study was to determine how employed mothers are portrayed in children's fiction. The researcher analyzed eighteen books of children's fiction by means of a checklist in order to determine if the majority of employed mothers are 1) working for economic purposes rather than for purposes of self-actualization; 2) are the cause of stress and tension in the family because of the redistribution of roles and responsibilities, and 3) do not have healthy, growing, supportive relationships with their husbands. The results of this study include acceptance of Hypothesis 1, and the rejection of Hypotheses 2 and 3.

THE PORTRAYAL OF EMPLOYED MOTHERS IN CHILDREN'S FICTION

A Research Paper

Presented to the

Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts

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ABSTRACT

In American society today, mothers are joining the employment forces for economic purposes, and because they feel a need to fulfill their personal potentials or gain self-actualization. The portrayals of employed mothers in children's fiction should reflect the trends of society, as well as provide appropriate role models for children. The purpose of this study was to determine how employed mothers are portrayed in children's fiction. The researcher analyzed eighteen books of children's fiction by means of a checklist in order to determine if the majority of employed mothers are 1) working for economic purposes rather than for purposes of self-actualization; 2) are the cause of stress and tension in the family because of the redistribution of roles and responsibilities, and 3) do not have healthy, growing, supportive relationships with their husbands. The results of this study include acceptance of Hypothesis 1, and the rejection of Hypotheses 2 and 3.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Mothers - Employed" is more than a concept in today's society. In our country, the number of mothers in the labor force rose by 20 percentage points between the years of 1970 and 1984 (Haghe, 1984). Interestingly, it was the married mother's increased participation in the work place which made the greatest impact on the rising statistics. Further, mothers are not following any trend to wait until their children are of "school age" before joining, or rejoining as the case may be, the ranks of the employed. Nearly half of the mothers with children age one or younger were in the labor force. Women maintaining homes, families, and careers are an indisputable fact of life.

Prophetic writers during World War II warned that women would not willingly leave and stay out of the work force simply to make room and employment for men returning from the armed forces. Having discovered talents and skills within themselves, women wanted and needed to apply their abilities in realms beyond the home. Longer life-spans have also brought about the desire women have for employment. With more years of life after the children leave the proverbial nest, women may consider occupations other than nurturing and homemaking to fill time in a worthwhile manner.

Perhaps the most powerful factor drawing women into the

employment force is economics. Women choose to work for several economic reasons. One of the more common reasons for a mother to work is economic necessity. Frequently, a single income will not support a family unit and additional income, or a second income, needs to be provided for the family's well being. In this situation the mother may not really want to work, but may prefer to stay at home with her children. She may also lack job skills and be forced to take a position which she does not enjoy, or which may not offer opportunities for advancement. This combination, in turn, may cause stress for the mother as well as her family, often driving the family members to blame the mother for problems in the home and giving her a strong sense of guilt.

Another economic reason why a mother seeks employment is to help the family achieve and maintain a higher standard of living. This differs from the previous category. Maintaining a standard of living implies that the necessities of life can be met by a single income, but the family desires additional comforts and luxuries which a second income can afford. In these circumstances, the mother may be more willing to leave duties in the home because there is a bottom line advantage for her and her family. There may also be a greater willingness upon the part of the family to assume and distribute duties that are normally designated to the female parent.

Finally, there are mothers who take jobs because they are seeking a sense of independence and self-actualization.

These are women who consciously choose to be away from the home and its traditional responsibilities. While a family may be supportive of an employed mother under these circumstances, she may also face the accusation that she is selfish and is placing her own pleasure above the well-being of the family.

Beyond simple dollars and cents, many women desire the same kind of independence which most men appear to have. It is an independence which may begin financially, but it goes much deeper. The independence sought is a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. It also means that the value of the woman should not be limited to her ability to nurture a family, or to her ambitions in a career. A father serving on a sex-roles committee at his children's school may have best explained it,

Well, nuturing is good work; but it doesn't *have to be* women's work. It's more valuable than writing an estoteric poem, but it doesn't have to be 'prettified'. If my daughter made the choice to be a mother, if she were one of those rare women for whom it is a real vocation, I would not be displeased -- although perhaps I should qualify that -- If she were paid for her work, I'd feel better. A woman dependent displeases me. In this world money makes you independent. If mothering had an official recognized status and income, I'd like it better. Would I want my son to be just a father? When I reverse it like that, I see that it's not right, because he'd be dependent.

(Harrison, 1973, p. 116.)

If children are to learn broader, more egalitarian sex roles, they need examples and role models to pattern. These roles should be found in the people with whom they have daily contact; these roles should be found in the literature read

for pleasure, as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn if a variety of positive role models are presented to children in their fictional reading. The specific role which the researcher addressed is that of the employed mother.

Problem Statement and Hypotheses

How are employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction?

The researcher believes that in children's fiction the reason for poor family relationships, for familial tension and stress would be blamed upon an employed mother. Due to this assumption, the researcher believes that:

1. The majority of reasons for employment of mothers portrayed in children's fiction are for economic purposes rather than for purposes of self-actualization.
2. The majority of roles and responsibilities described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction represent changes in the responsibilities for family members.
3. The majority of relationships described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction are not healthy, growing, supportive relationships with their husbands.

Definitions

"Children's fiction" refers to the body of fiction literature written for students in grades kindergarten through eighth, and who are between the ages of five and thirteen.

"Employed mother" is defined as a mother earning an hourly wage or a salary in return for a service rendered or for a production skill provided.

"Homemaker mother" applies to women who perform services and provide skills only in their own home, and for which they receive no salary or wage.

"Self-actualization" is used to indicate the fulfillment of one's innate, positive potentialities (Wolman, 1973, p. 342).

"Economic purpose" is a general term which may refer to one of two circumstances. The first may be "working to provide the necessities of life." The second may be "working to maintain a standard or style of living." The researcher has indicated which definition is to be applied when the general term is used.

Assumptions

This study is based upon three assumptions. The researcher assumes that what a child reads does bear some varying degree of influence upon the values system the child develops and carries through life. Further, a child may consciously or even unconsciously adopt a literary character as a role model for future choices and behaviors. The

researcher also assumes that a relationship generally does exist between a mother and her children, and that there is a body of children's literature which portrays employed mothers and their relationship to children and to the entire family unit.

Limitations

This study is limited to children's fiction which includes the portrayal of a working mother who has a visible relationship with a child or children character in each book. Employed women with no children have not been considered as a part of this research. Married and cohabiting mothers are included in this study. Since one hypothesis is concerned with the problems working mothers may have in developing and maintaining relationships with men, mothers who have failed and/or terminated marital relationships are not considered in the analysis.

The books analyzed in the study are limited to those which are recommended by inclusion in the card catalog of the Youth Collection at the University of Northern Iowa Library, and which are recommended by The Book Finder and by Girls are People Too! as being suitable for children in the age range of five to thirteen years, or grades kindergarten through eighth. Further, the analysis includes only those books which have been published between the years 1974 and 1985 inclusive. The researcher has limited this study to those works which are available in or through the library

services of the University of Northern Iowa, and through the⁷
public or school libraries in Sanborn and Sheldon, Iowa.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study begins several paces back from the specific topic of employed mothers in children's literature. Little has been published in regard to the situation and condition in terms of its impact on library selection and recommendations; nor is there any substantive proof that books about employed mothers actually influence child readers. Therefore, this literature review will survey the following points which figure into the phenomena of the employed mother. First, there will be an examination of the stereotyping of women in children's literature. From this view of stereotypes, the information will then focus upon the influence of sex roles on children and adolescents when they form their opinions and choices for their own lives and careers. Next, there will be an overview of family roles, how they have been perceived, redefined, accepted (or not accepted) in reality, and reflected in fiction. Since a mother role is traditional in the family unit, and as the purpose for this study, the employed mother in literature will be considered in the final section of this review.

Women may have originally contributed to their own setbacks after World War II. When the veterans returned from Europe and the Pacific, women who had kept industry moving returned in great numbers to their homes and to the

homemaking occupations. There may be, without doubt, an unending debate whether the move was voluntary on the part of those women or if they were compelled to quit by the male supervisory force. History does show that during the 50's the accepted and acceptable place for married women was in the home and not in the work place. In 1950 specifically, fewer than 20% of mothers were in the labor force (Hillman, 1974, p. 85). What a contrast to present facts!

U. S. census statistics show that women comprise over half of our national population, and slightly more than half of those women are a part of the labor force. It is ironic, to say the least, that the reflected image of women in the literature for children and adolescents would appear to be quite different. In a study done by John Stewig and Margaret Higgs (1973) a survey of children's picture books disclosed that while women were portrayed in 65.5% of the books, 84% of those women functioned in homemaking related roles.

In a survey of Caldecott Award books Alleen Pace Nilsen also found discrepancies in the balance of portrayal. She worked with a list of eighty books, and in counting total number of characters, she found 386 females and 579 males (p. 919). Clearly, a greater balance between reality and reading material seems needed.

When women play a part in picture books and in most of children's literature, the roles are frequently passive. While male characters foray into the world to pursue careers and adventures, women and girls are on the outside fringes of

the action. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the females are actually on the inside looking out. They stand inside the doorways and windows of the homes and wave goodbye to the adventuring males, and they work inside the house, maintaining the homefront (Nilsen, 1971).

Hillman (1974) conducted additional study into the roles of males and females in literature. She made a comparison between children's books published during 1932 - 1938, and books published during 1965 - 1971. During both time periods the number of males characterized was greater than the number of females characterized. Hillman notes that some measure of equalization of the balance occurred during the later period; however, male dominance still remained over 60% (p. 86).

In that same study Hillman examined specific categories of behavior for males and female in children's books. She noted that there had been some movement toward changes which allowed females to "adopt characteristics previously considered 'male'" (p. 86.) and that there had been a general broadening of sex role standards over the thirty years included in the study. Nonetheless, she also concluded that the most apparent differences remain in the "occupational patterns of the sexes" (p. 86).

Men in the occupational force are accepted and even expected to possess such characteristics as aggression, both physical and verbal, competence, independence, power, and achievement orientation. In a male these are positive traits, reasons for admiration. But when women possess these

same traits, especially in children's folktales, they are wicked. Donlan (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974) observed that there were three types of women which consistently recurred in children's literature. First there was the old woman, eccentric, befuddled and imperceptive. Then there was the beautiful young heroine whose traits include passiveness, dull-wittedness, and general dependence on male heroes. The only women who seem able to take control of their circumstances are witches. Donlan also comments that while these creatures may possess greater strength within their characters, they are "usually less intelligent than their male antagonists" (p. 223).

Judging from the dates of these previously conducted studies about the question of female stereotyping in children's literature, it is plain that women have been confined to specific and limited occupations. Does it make any impact upon children when they perceive women in general, and their mothers particularly, in these closely defined, stereotypical roles?

The response of society to such a question is yes, indeed; how children perceive role models does affect their values and the ideas they carry into adolescence and adulthood. Further, children find role models in their reading materials, which also bear varying degrees of influence on their perceptions and understandings. In a study published in 1986, Kaye E. Gardner and Suzanne V. LaBreque investigated the effects of maternal employment on

the sex role orientation in adolescents. One of the first facts that they document and emphasize is that there is not scientific support for the notion that children of working mothers suffer ill effects due to that single condition. They do conclude, as a result of their research, that attitudes of adolescents toward sex roles are influenced by maternal employment. The general conclusion of the study would even seem to go so far as indicating that children and adolescents of employed mothers have broader sex role orientations than the offspring of homemaker mothers (p. 882).

If we accept the general assumption that literature does bear some measure of influence upon child and adolescent readers, and if the conclusions drawn by Gardner and LaBreque (1986) are also to be accepted, then the researcher may ask, how do family roles in children's literature reflect society and influence their readers?

In 1981, W. Bernard Lukenbill conducted a content analysis into the family systems of adolescent novels. The author considered selected family concepts in literature and explored the possible social influence the portrayals may have upon young readers. The majority of family units examined seemed to present a less than positive portrait. The role and behavior models were not such that society would want to encourage. However, Lukenbill also suggests that these novels and roles may encourage young readers to look critically at the harmful behavior and seek out solutions for

the literary setting that might also be applied in society.

Kurth (1982) also looked at the portrayal of parents in adolescent novels. While her inquiries covered only three broad categories of parents and their relationships with their children, the conclusions provide results similar to those in Lukenbill's 1981 study. Essentially, parents in adolescent novels are unsympathetic and in conflict with their children. While it is a fact that novels are composed around some type of conflict, and that most teenage conflicts are home-centered, focusing upon the parents as the negative force may be harmful and possibly even untrue.

Lukenbill (1974) analyzed fifty realistic fiction books which were recommended for children and adolescents. Lukenbill felt it was important to examine the role of fathers in fiction because of the move to broaden sex roles in society. After studying the paternal roles, two conclusions were drawn. First, the fathers were portrayed primarily as the breadwinners, respected by their children, and maintaining good relationships with their wives. This was, in Lukenbill's judgement, in keeping with societal norms. The noticeable shortcoming was in the portrayal of the mothers. While their characteristics may have been intended as a sort of foil for the father figure, nonetheless, they appeared "weak and unassuming individuals with little identity outside their homes, and with little real influence on the family environment" (p. 29).

To focus more specifically upon the mother role, a

survey of adolescent literature by Anna Lee Stensland (1984) deserves some inspection. She examined a variety of adolescent and adult novels which portrayed women in a variety of roles. The purpose for this particular analysis was to highlight the changes in sex roles for women, whether authors acknowledged these changes, and how they made such acknowledgement in their writings. What she found was a mixed bag of female characters and values. Among them were mothers and wives who devoted themselves to homemaking, single mothers who worked because of economic necessity, but would have preferred to be with their children, and working women who neglected their children for a career. Although various perspectives of motherhood and employment were portrayed in the books examined, Stensland also remarked that one theme not developed was the conflict of a young woman trying to balance being a good wife and mother with being a full-time, competent career person.

An article which also focused on the either/or condition of career and motherhood was written in 1976 by Lou Willett Stanek. One of Stanek's strongest opinions was that women who have been in a position to combine nurturing and career have made a conscious choice not to make such a combination. Women writers could set an example not only in their literature, but in their own lives. Yet the feminist movement, in order to achieve career possibilities for women, has placed the combination of motherhood and employment in a second class category (p. 47).

Yet another twist in the portrayal of employed mothers should be noted at this point. Ann Donovan (1983) examined some children's fiction and found that there is a tendency to reverse the roles of child and mother. In many instances the children have taken on the nurturing role for a mother who may be able to function in the labor force, but cannot remember where the cold cereal is kept in her own kitchen cupboard. This kind of sarcasm and reversing the natural order can have several negative effects. Donovan leads us to understand that writers must be aware of the fine line between characterizations of individuals and stereotype. This distinction is important because, "The mother may be a character either well or poorly portrayed artistically. But she is also serving as a cultural message carrier and becoming increasingly prominent per se" (p. 138).

It is not the role of literature, nor the role of the librarian who selects the literature for circulation, to decide that only one example for life standards be presented to young readers. Instead, there should be a great variety of role models with which children may become acquainted during their recreational reading. Both boys and girls need to become aware that occupational possibilities for everyone are only as limited as the individual's imagination. Furthermore, responsibilities for the home and family are not determined by gender. If young people are to develop these broader sex role ideas and embrace them as personal ideals,

then they need examples to follow, in life, and in literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study used the methodology of content analysis in the effort to transform the concepts of employed mothers into measurable categories of data (Busha and Harter, 1980, p. 71). Since there are no comprehensive lists of books which portray employed mothers, the first task in this method was to select an appropriate sample.

To produce a fair random sample list of titles which met with the limitations of this study, the researcher searched the card catalog of the Youth Collection at the University of Northern Iowa library under the subject heading "Mothers-Employed". All titles within this category and recommended for ages 5 (five) through 13 (thirteen) and grades kindergarten through eighth grade were considered part of the research population. In addition to using the card catalog for identifying the population, two aids for selection were consulted. Dreyer's The Book Finder (1985) is a reference work which categorizes current children's books according to psychological, behavioral and developmental topics. For the purposes of this study, the topic "Mothers Working Outside Home" was a source for titles.

The second reference work consulted was Girls are People Too! by Joan E. Newman (1982). The selections in this

bibliography were drawn from various non-sexist and minority bibliographies, and cover grade ranges from preschool to ninth grade. The researcher drew titles from the subject categories of "Working Mothers" and "Careers", as listed in the index. From these three methods and tools, an initial population of fourteen books was created.

The researcher, desiring a larger population from which an analysis could be made, chose books from the card catalog subject heading "Family Life-Fiction". These books were examined by the researcher to determine whether they met with the publication date limitations, and whether they met with the criteria of portraying an employed mother who was married or cohabiting. Based upon these limitations, four more titles were selected for analysis creating a total population of eighteen books. This population is referred to as Appendix A throughout the remainder of this study.

All titles used for research and analysis were available in the Sanborn (Iowa) Community School Library, the Sanborn Public Library, the Sheldon (Iowa) Public Library, the Cedar Falls (Iowa) Public Library, or the Youth Collection of the University of Northern Iowa's Library.

The researcher read and analyzed each work. An investigation of the elements and concepts pertaining to the hypotheses was made by means of a checklist (Appendix B). The checklist consisted of six categories and each category contained additional subcategories.

The first three categories included on the checklist

were not directly related to any of the hypotheses; however, the researcher collected these data to determine if and why there may be a relationship between these categories and the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses. The fourth category investigated a variety of reasons why a mother may be employed. Mothers might actually exhibit multiple reasons for being employed and the collected data would exhibit such a phenomenon. It might often be the case that while a mother takes a position of employ to supplement family finances, her job also enhances her sense of self-esteem: she might enjoy working for the sake of working. If a mother works in order to supplement a primary income, the primary income is that which the father earns. Furthermore, the supplementary income may serve the purpose of helping meet necessities such as food shelter, and clothing. Or, the supplementary income earned by the mother may allow the family to enjoy such comforts and luxuries of lifestyle as additional entertainment, vacations, new or remodeled home, newer and additional automobiles, and other items which are not necessary for day-to-day existence.

The self-actualization which a woman may hope to achieve through employment is, according to Abraham Maslow, an innate tendency to fulfill one's talents and potentialities. It is also a weak tendency, one to which a person must be particularly sensitive, or else run the risk of suppressing it. The result of such suppression might be as extreme as possible chronic depression (Bruno, 1986, p. 207).

Category 5 investigated the redistribution of household responsibilities which may occur when the mother is employed. The purpose of investigating who assumes or shares the responsibilities was to determine if there was one family member undertaking excessive amounts of work which in turn might lead to tension, stress and family dysfunction. In the sixth category the questions were directed toward the relationship shared by the mother and father. In considering the time the parents spend together, how they approach the handling of family issues, and how they may or may not offer support and respect for one another, the researcher was able to determine the acceptance or rejection of Hypothesis 3.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data obtained through the readings was recorded in an inventory for the six categories and their subcategories. The data were then tabulated, and percentages calculated for each subcategory. These results determined if the hypotheses would be accepted or rejected.

One mother from each of the eighteen books surveyed met the criteria for marriage and employment which was established in the methodology of this study. As may be noted in Table 1, only one mother was not specifically described as married. However, the text references to the father allowed the researcher to assume that it was a probable marriage relationship and, thus, allowed the book to be included within the population.

The major level of employment at which the mothers worked was the professional/executive stage, with 11 of the 18 falling into that bracket. Here too, three of the primary level books, including Bauer's My Mom Travels A Lot, Hazen's Tight Times, and Schick's Home Alone, contained no reference to the type or level of employment the mothers held.

The most frequent method of problem solving noted in the analysis was discussion and compromise: 22 instances or 56% of the times more than one family member was involved in settling issues and problems which arose. The manner of

discussion would often be between parents, and the compromise would be to allow the child to choose one of two or more possible punishments.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF MARRIED MOTHERS,
LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT, AND PROBLEM SOLVING METHODS USED

	NUMBER	PERCENT
MOTHERS		
A. MARRIED	17	94%
B. COHABITING	0	0%
C. NOT REPORTED	1	6%
TOTAL	18	100%
LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT		
A. PROFESSIONAL/EXECUTIVE	11	61%
B. SKILLED	4	22%
C. UNSKILLED	0	0%
D. NOT REPORTED	3	17%
TOTAL	18	100%
PROBLEM SOLVING METHODS		
A. DISCUSS/COMPROMISE	22	56%
B. ULTIMATUM/EDICTS	9	23%
C. IGNORE THE PROBLEM	5	13%
D. OTHER	3	8%
TOTAL	39	100%

One of the more extreme examples of the practice of delivering ultimatums was found in Byars's Glory Girl. The mother was the pianist for the family's gospel band, an organization which provided the primary source for the family's income. The mother was placed in the skilled employment category on the checklist based upon the fact that all decisions and acts of control belonged to the father/employer. One of his more outrageous demands was

directed toward his accident-prone twin sons: "Those stitches cost me sixty-four dollars...And these accidents have got to stop! You've had your last stitch, Joshua, you hear me?...I don't care if you split yourself wide open" (p. 29-31).

In contrast, Lotty's family shares fully in weighing possible courses of action when the fifth grade daughter in Shreve's Bad Dreams of a Good Girl skips school one afternoon. Instead of grounding Lotty or forbidding her to ever pull such a stunt again, they discuss the motive behind the action. One of Lotty's classmates has organized *The I Hate Lotty Club*. The mother gave Lotty a time to cool off by having her excused from a day of school, and the family offered long term solutions to the dilemma:

"You will have to go back to Beech Tree," my father said to me at supper that night..."If you don't go back, you're letting Kathy Whatever get away with her scheme."...

"Kathy's jealous," Nicholas said thoughtfully.

"She's afraid you'll take her place at Beech Tree. You're smart, pretty and athletic," he said...

"Ignore Kathy Sanders, Lotty," [Sammy] said.

"Pretend she doesn't matter at all" (p. 23).

While there was the inflexible fact that Lotty must return to school, there were several people offering choices to solve the real problem, dealing with the *I Hate Lotty Club*. The most creative and effective solution came not from a domineering parent, but from brother Nicholas: Lotty should petition to join the club herself!

Most mothers who are in the work force have multiple

reasons for employment (See Table 2). While five of the eighteen books analyzed did not state any specific reason for the mother to be employed, six of the books did give a single reason for employment, six had two stated reasons for employment, and one book in the survey, Cleary's Ramona and Her Mother, gave a total of three different reasons why the mother was working outside of the home. In relationship to Hypothesis 1 which states that mothers are working for economic purposes rather than for purposes of self-

TABLE 2
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF REASONS GIVEN BY MOTHERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

REASONS	NUMBER	PERCENT
A. PROVIDE PRIMARY INCOME	5	19%
B. SUPPLEMENT PRIMARY INCOME FOR NECESSITIES	3	12%
C. SUPPLEMENT PRIMARY INCOME FOR LUXURIES	7	27%
D. SELF-ACTUALIZATION	5	19%
E. OTHER	1	4%
F. NOT REPORTED	5	19%
TOTAL	26	100%

actualization, only one mother in the eighteen books examined stated self-actualization as the sole purpose for entering the work force (Love, But What About Me?). On the other hand, 58% of the reasons for maternal employment were economic in nature, including 19% for primary income earning, 12% to supplement primary income for necessities, and 27% to supplement primary income to provide additional comforts and luxuries of lifestyle. Only 19% of the reasons for

employment by mothers in the analysis was considered self-actualization, or working for their own personal fulfillment as a reason for being employed, therefore Hypothesis 1 was accepted.

The distribution of household responsibilities was analyzed for the purpose of determining how chores and duties were shared by family members, and if there was an imbalance in the sharing of responsibilities which might cause tension and stress within the family unit (See Table 3).

Meal preparation, housecleaning and child care were the three major responsibilities which were described most frequently in the books. The other responsibilities, while sometimes mentioned, were not mentioned often either in terms of frequency performed, or who performed them. In fact there were no mentions of lawn and garden care, two mentions for "other" chores such as mending clothes and building a fire in the fireplace, and three occasions when mechanical repairs were mentioned.

The meals were prepared by the mother 10 of 40 times, and for another 7 occasions noted an "other" method of meal preparation was used, essentially meaning ordering a carry-out meal or going to a restaurant for meals. Meal preparation was completed 6 times by children in the families, and 7 times the task was shared jointly by mothers and children. Fathers were least involved in this particular chore, taking full responsibility only twice, and sharing the job with the

children 4 times and with the mother 3 times.

TABLE 3
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLD ROLES BY PERSONS PERFORMING

	MOTHER	FATHER	CHILD	M/F*	M/C*	F/C*	M/F/C*	OTHER	TOTALS
<hr/>									
TRADITIONAL MOTHER ROLES									
A. MEAL PREPARATION	10	2	6	1	7	4	3	7	40
B. HOUSECLEANING	1	2	8	3	2	0	3	3	22
C. LAUNDRY	4	4	2	1	1	0	1	2	15
D. CHILD CARE	6	4	1	3	0	0	0	10	24
TOTALS	21	12	17	8	10	4	7	22	101
PERCENTAGE	21%	12%	17%	8%	10%	4%	7%	22%	101%*
TRADITIONAL FATHER									
E. FAMILY PROB. SOLV.	4	1	0	3	0	1	1	0	10
F. DISCIPLINE OF CHILD	2	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	9
G. LAWN/GARDEN CARE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H. REPAIRS	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
TOTALS	7	5	0	7	0	1	1	1	22
PERCENTAGE	32%	23%	0%	32%	0%	5%	5%	5%	102%*
I. OTHER	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
TOTALS	29	18	17	15	10	5	8	23	125
PERCENTAGE	23%	14%	14%	12%	8%	4%	6%	18%	99%*

*M=Mother F=Father C=Children

*Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

There was an interesting observation in the distribution of housecleaning chores: 8 of 22 times these chores were performed by the children in the family unit. In fact, on a few of those occasions the children voluntarily initiated cleaning projects, such as making beds and washing dishes. It was also in this subcategory that a change in maternal roles was observed; only one of the mothers undertook housecleaning duties.

Regarding the matter of child care, it might be assumed that both parents generally are responsible for the care and

well-being of their children. However, when both parents are employed there are times when someone must be designated to provide child care. For 10 of the 24 times recorded this responsibility was given to a babysitter or the children were on their own. As a general practice, the babysitters were next door neighbors, and the latchkey children would often acknowledge their arrival at home by phoning the mother.

When a mother enters into employment, there might be enough change in domestic roles and duties to cause familial friction. But the analysis of books in this study showed that not only did mothers continue to carry responsibility for their traditional roles, but they also fulfilled 32% of the traditional father roles. In contrast, the fathers completed traditional mother roles 12% of the time and their own customary duties 23%. This seeming imbalance is further highlighted in the number of times mothers and fathers share traditional mother duties and when they share traditional father roles (See Table 3).

The mothers accounted for 23% of the domestic responsibilities, fathers for 14% and children for 14%. The remaining roles and duties are shared in varying combinations by parents, children and others; therefore, Hypothesis 2, "The majority of roles and responsibilities described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction represent changes in the traditional roles and responsibilities of family members", was rejected.

Where the father's relationship with and support for the mother is concerned, the results were clear and indisputable within the limitations of this study. Although specific instances were noted where fathers and mothers were in disagreement with one another, the total of 74% support for the employed mother was well beyond the 50% mark needed to reject Hypothesis 3, which stated, "The majority of relationships described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction are not healthy, growing, supportive relationships with their husbands."

One of the more ingenious means of demonstrating support for the mother's career was in Sonya's Mommy Works by Arlene Alda. A small child was feeling insecure about her mother's upcoming business trip and her father offered her this consolation, "Daddy says, 'Wouldn't you like to go on a business trip if you were a Mommy?' Sonya thinks. 'Yes,' she says." Not only is this father giving approval to the mother's pursuit of a career, he is building a framework for his daughter's future goals. In such books as The Bad Dreams of a Good Girl (Shreve), Ramona and Her Father (Cleary), and Tomboy, (Klein), the supportive and respectful words and actions were often described in conversations between the father and the children, similar to the dialogue between Sonya and her daddy.

Also in Shreve was the example of offering encouragement as the mother went through the process of searching and

interviewing for an appropriate position. Lotty, the narrator, was not in favor of her mother rejoining the work force, but her father's position was more supportive.

It took her all fall to find a job...

"Well?" my father would ask carefully at supper on a day my mother was expecting to hear about one job or another. She must have tried for a hundred and fifty at least.

"Nope," she'd say sadly, and my heart would leap for joy.

"It'll take time," my father said. "You'll find something soon, Maggie." (p. 43).

In Anastasia On Her Own, Lois Lowry creates such an attitude of respect and encouragement for the mother's career that the family would actually hide domestic problems from the mother. Mrs. Krupnik was in California on business, and she called home to Massachusetts to check in with her family. All three members at home consistently omitted such happenings as a case of chicken pox and the visit of the father's one-time fiancée in order not to interfere with Mom's job!

The time which mothers and fathers spent together separate from their children ranged from being in a separate room within the home in Tight Times (Hazen), to an evening out for dinner to celebrate a wedding anniversary in Klein's Tomboy. There were other occasions such as in Love's But What About Me? when the parents were called out of town for an illness in the family, and the child was left at home with a neighbor. While tending to a sick family member may not be

an ideal means for two parents to have time alone with one another, the mother's employment did not prove to be a great barrier in achieving that time.

In the subcategory of fathers placing emotional, mental and physical barriers between mothers and careers, an even split occurred in the observed attitudes. Barriers were as minor as the father in But What About Me? complaining in only semi-serious tones that he hadn't been served his favorite black bottom pie since his wife became employed. At the other extreme was a serious difficulty in the parental relationship because the father felt threatened. Danziger's Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice? showed a father who felt he had control over his wife and family because he was the breadwinner.

"Who feels threatened?" he yells. "That's ridiculous. Just because you won't have to depend on me, need me anymore, why should I worry?" So that's why he's acting this way. He thinks it's the money that makes him important (p. 74).

When it seemed that financial control was threatened, the father became angry and blamed the mother's employment for his insecurities, placing an emotional barrier between the mother and her career.

Examples of the father trying to prevent emotional barriers between the mother and her employment were evident in Cleary's Ramona and Her Father, and in the Girion books, Misty and Me and Like Everybody Else. In all of these works the fathers actually spoke in defense of the mothers' choice

to pursue a career instead of being tied exclusively to traditional mother-in-the-home roles. Mrs. Quimby did not have to make a Christmas pageant costume for Ramona, according to Cleary's father character, and Girion's father didn't expect his wife to prepare gourmet meals like the neighborhood women did (Like Everybody Else). The fathers made the efforts to actually eliminate the possible barriers which might cause stress for the employed mothers.

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF STATEMENTS ABOUT PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

STATEMENTS	YES	NO	TOTAL
A. MOTHER/FATHER SPEND NO TIME ALONE	3	10	13
B. MOTHER/FATHER DO NOT DISCUSS IN PRIVATE	3	4	7
C. MOTHER/FATHER DO NOT DISCUSS FINANCES	1	8	9
D. ONLY UNITY FOR PARENTS IS CHILDREN	0	2	2
E. MOTHER/FATHER DIVIDED OVER CHILD CARE	1	1	2
F. MOTHER/FATHER DIVIDED OVER DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES	2	0	2
G. MOTHER/FATHER DIVIDED OVER FINANCES	1	0	1
H. FATHER SHOWS MOTHER NO VERBAL RESPECT	2	17	19
I. FATHER SHOWS MOTHER NO RESPECT THROUGH ACTIONS	1	12	13
J. FATHER IS CRITICAL OF MOTHER'S CAREER	2	4	6
K. FATHER IS CRITICAL OF TIME MOTHER GIVES JOB	2	1	3
L. FATHER PLACES BARRIERS BETWEEN MOTHER AND CAREER	4	4	8
M. OTHER	0	0	0
TOTAL	22	63	85
PERCENTAGE	26%	74%	100%

The analysis of the content of eighteen selected children's fiction books, revealed the following results. First, only 19% of the reasons given by the employed mothers included self-actualization as a reason for being on the job. Second, although 23% of the responsibilities for household chores were left to the employed mother, the remaining 77% of the responsibilities were borne by other individuals or combinations of individuals in the families. Finally, in the books used for this content analysis, 74% of the husbands demonstrated respect for the employed mother and her career by words and actions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

Some conclusions can be drawn from the data gathered in this study, but such conclusions are limited to the narrow confines of this study and are not to be taken as general indications regarding all children's fiction.

There was one finding which did not have a direct influence upon hypotheses, but might explain some underlying tendencies in the authors' development of content. This finding was the percentage of mothers portrayed at the professional/executive employment level (see Table 1). A total of 61% of the mothers in the analyzed books were professionals in business, education, and free lance writing or artistry. The authors seemed to prefer to project the image of a mother who is well-trained and able to bear the responsibilities of a professional career.

Related to these findings are the methods of problem-solving which were noted. Of the professionally employed mothers, 71% of the occasions for their handling family difficulties were by discussion and compromise. Families with skilled-labor mothers used discussion and compromise as a solution 60% of the time. The difference between the methods used by mothers in the two employment categories is

further highlighted by the alternative methods used. While in the skilled mother families 40% of problems were countered with ultimatums, only 10% were so handled in the families of professional mothers. Since the delivery of an ultimatum is usually limited to one person, the observations made in this study indicate how the power in the family may be limited to one person, the father especially, when the mother may not have acquired skills in problem solving and decision making outside the home.

The general significance of these findings is the implications for family stress and tension. Discussion by all family members would probably be more conducive to harmony in the home, than would be a state where one or a few are trying to maintain close control of the family through edicts and demands.

Discerning reasons for mothers being employed was both frustrating and pleasantly surprising for the researcher. The frustration was due to the fact that very few of the primary level books gave any reason for a mother's employment; all five which gave no reason were titles for younger aged children.

In contrast, the books for third grade and older students contained direct dialogue in which the mother explained her reasons for pursuing employment and a career. The mother whose sole reason for being employed was self-actualization made her purpose known to her daughter when she

explained that she needed "something of her very own...something that will be around when you've grown up and gone" (Love, But What About Me? p. 51). This is one of several circumstances where the frequencies recorded as reasons for employment are clearly based on direct statements by the portrayed mothers.

The data regarding the duties of housecleaning would appear to imply that when a mother is employed, the housecleaning responsibilities may need to be assigned to other family members, if they had not been before the mother's employment. However, it should also be kept in mind that simple housecleaning is often assigned to children as a means of teaching a general sense of responsibility, whether the mother is employed outside of the home or not.

A final and curious finding not anticipated by the original methodology of this study pertains to the authors. The sixteen authors of these books which portray employed mothers are all women. This raises an implicit question: how would a male author portray employed mothers; would there be a difference in portrayals?

This study does draw out a concern of which media specialists should be aware. Librarians have an obligation to make all literature available to patrons. This means that all fiction for children should not portray only professionally employed mothers, nor should children's literature be selected only to show mothers exclusively

occupied in tending the home and the family. There is a need and a responsibility for a mixture and balance. There is also the necessity to provide an accurate reflection of life and reality through literature. The librarian selecting and recommending books which include portrayals of employed mothers must be aware of the reality or lack of it in the books they circulate.

While several questions have been answered by this study of the content of selected children's fiction, as many and more can be raised and might be considered for further study. First, while the hypothesis directed toward family tension and stress was rejected by this study, there might be different findings if the responses of the children to the mother's employment were reported more clearly and in greater detail.

Another possible methodology which might reveal new statistics and conclusions would be to use a body of literature as a control group (those books which are recommended as exemplary portrayals of the employed mother), and an experimental group of current books which happen to include an employed mother as a character. Using a random selection of current titles, without a set of limiting criteria such as was used in this study, a greater variety of portrayals of employed mothers may be revealed, and greater differences in attitudes and relationships may be discovered.

In summary, the reality of employed mothers is embedded

upon American society. Maternal employment is often a necessity due to economic forces and also due to the fact that women are acknowledging they need to develop their special potentials as well as their self-esteem and personal independence. The reality of employed mothers must and has been treated in the fiction literature for children. How those mothers are portrayed, though, may influence the values of child readers, and it is, therefore, important to examine those portrayals for accuracy and for the kind of role models they present.

In this study selected works of children's fiction were read and analyzed to determine acceptance or rejection of the following hypotheses:

1. The majority of reasons for employment of mothers portrayed in children's fiction are for economic purposes rather than for purposes of self-actualization.
2. The majority of roles and responsibilities described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction represent changes in the traditional roles and responsibilities of family members.
3. The majority of relationships described for employed mothers portrayed in children's fiction are not

healthy, growing, supportive relationships with their husbands.

While Hypothesis 1 was accepted, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were rejected. Possible reasons for these results and implications for further study may be found in the fact that most of the books selected for analysis were chosen by recommendations in tools which considered the books to be exemplary in their treatment of females, including employed mothers. Additional studies might include literature which has not been given specific labels of recommendation, and might also use an instrument which allows for child response and reaction to the mother's employed status.

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APPENDIX A
TITLES USED IN ANALYSIS

- Alda, Arlene. Sonya's Mommy Works
- Bauer, Caroline Feller. My Mom Travels A Lot
- Blaine, Marge. The Terrible Thing That Happened At Our House
- Byars, Betsy. The Glory Girl
- Cleary, Beverly Bunn. Ramona and Her Father
- Cleary, Beverly Bunn. Ramona and Her Mother
- Danziger, Paula. Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?
- Girion, Barbara. Misty and Me
- Girion, Barbara. Like Everybody Else
- Hazen, Barbara Shook. Tight Times
- Klein, Norma. Tomboy
- Love, Sandra. But What About Me?
- Lowry, Lois. Anastasia on Her Own
- Power, Barbara. I Wish Laura's Mommy Were My Mommy
- Schick, Eleanor. Home Alone
- Shreve, Susan. The Bad Dreams of a Good Girl
- Smith, Lucie B. My Mom Got a Job
- Stecher, Miriam B. and Alice S. Kandell. Daddy and Ben
Together

APPENDIX B

Checklist

"The Portrayal of Employed Mothers in Children's Fiction"

Author:

Title:

Publisher:

Date:

	YES	NO
I. Mother's Marital Status		
A. Married?	_____	_____
B. Cohabiting?	_____	_____
II. Level of Employment		
A. Professional/executive?	_____	_____
B. Skilled?	_____	_____
C. Unskilled?	_____	_____
III. Problem Solving Methods		
A. Parents and children discuss and reach mutual set of conclusions?	_____	_____
B. Parents give edicts and ultimatums?	_____	_____
C. Parents avoid dealing with or facing problems?	_____	_____
D. Other	_____	_____
IV. Reason for Employment		
A. To provide primary income?	_____	_____
B. To supplement primary income to meet necessities?	_____	_____
C. To supplement primary income to provide additional comforts and luxuries of lifestyle?	_____	_____
D. To gain self-actualization?	_____	_____
E. Other	_____	_____
V. Distribution of Household Responsibilities		
The following number codes will be used to indicate who fulfills the duties listed in the subcategories of Category V.		
1. Mother	2. Father	3. Child
4. Mother/Father share	5. Mother/Child share	
6. Father/Child share	7. Mother/Father/Child share	
8. Other		
A. Meal preparation	_____	_____
B. Housecleaning	_____	_____
C. Laundry	_____	_____

- D. Child care _____
- E. Family problem solving _____
- F. Discipline of children _____
- G. Lawn and garden care _____
- H. Repairs (electrical, plumbing,
auto, other mechanical) _____
- I. Other _____

YES NO

VI. Parental Relationships

- A. Mother and father do not spend
time together, separate from
children? _____
- B. Mother and father do not
discuss and plan for child
care regularly and privately
from the children? _____
- C. Mother and father do not
discuss domestic and financial
matters and reach reasonable,
satisfactory compromises? _____
- D. The only unifying bond for
mother and father is children? _____
- E. Mother and father are openly
divided over child care
management and methods? _____
- F. Mother and father are openly
divided and disagree over
division of domestic respon-
sibilities? _____
- G. Mother and father are openly
divided and disagree over
family financial management? _____
- H. Father does not demonstrate
respect for the employed
mother? _____
- I. Father does not demonstrate
respect for the employed
mother through specific
actions? _____
- J. Father is critical of employed
mother's career? _____
- K. Father is critical of the time
employed mother devotes to
career? _____
- L. Father tries to place
emotional, mental, physical
barriers between employed
mother and career? _____
- M. Other _____